

# Reaching back to Astoria of a different age

## Woman's memories of early days clear

By NANCY BUTTERFIELD  
Of The Daily Astorian

When Louise Wise Asheim can't sleep, she thinks about her life — and she's got a lot to think about. Asheim became a century old in February.

The Astoria native lives at the Robison Jewish Home in Portland, where an all-day party celebrated her 100th birthday Feb. 20.

"All day there was something going on," she says. "There were balloons, a dinner for 30, and people came from New York, New Jersey, California and Seattle. There were friends there that I've known for 30 or 40 years."

Quite a celebration for the woman who was a little girl in Astoria before the turn of the century.

Asheim's father, Herman Wise, served as Astoria's postmaster and mayor. He was elected county judge in 1926 but died before he could serve. He arrived in Portland from Germany when he was 17, intending to go to Ilwaco, Wash., where he had heard he had cousins and uncles. But he spoke no English, and the large Jewish community in Portland took him under its wing. He was advised to study English at Bishop Scott's Academy, where he was given a basket full of needles and sewing supplies and taught to say "look in my basket," his first English words. Wise set out to sell the needles on the streets of Portland.

"Then someone told him that Astoria was close to Ilwaco, so that's where he went," Asheim recalls. "He went to Rosie Cohen's dry goods store on Bond Street and asked if he could sleep in the back room. She said 'OK, I'll give you \$5 a month for spending money.'"

"**SHORTLY AFTER THAT** a steamer arrived from San Francisco. On the boat was my mother, a beautiful blonde who had come to visit her sister, Rosie Cohen. It was love at first sight. My father proposed and she laughed at him. He said, 'There's a rabbi on the ship. We have to get married now or goodness knows how long we'll have to wait.' So they got married at the Fisher home in Astoria."

Political posters from her father's 1926 campaign for county judge hang on the wall of Asheim's room. She speaks of



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her father often, and near her bed is an album of family pictures.

Although very hard of hearing and legally blind, Asheim is alert and lively. She remembers a great deal about her childhood on the North Coast.

She and her family lived in the house at 1064 Harrison St. from the time she was 4 years old. In the same house in April 1912, she married Julius Asheim, after which the couple moved to Spokane, Wash.

Asheim visited Astoria several years ago with her daughter and was very disappointed in what she found. "The house looked awful," she says. When the active family of seven Wises lived in the home it was a showplace.

Asheim remembers having baths in a washtub, but that soon changed. "We had the first bathroom and bathtub in Astoria," she recalls. "It was a blue bathtub with gold feet. We had hot and cold running water and a white marble wash basin and the first indoor toilet."

She remembers the town's first elevator, in a building "near the funeral parlor."

She also remembers seeing Indians on the streets in Astoria. "The men walked ahead with the women trailing behind with papooses on their backs."

**FAMILY TRIPS WERE** big events during Asheim's youth, too. "We used to go to Portland by boat and stay overnight." She remembers the first train to Portland. "Fare was 25 cents each, and who was on that train? Herman Wise and his five kids."

"We always had help," Asheim recalls. "Irish, Finnish and Italian girls worked for us." She especially remembers Bertha O'Farrell. "I can see her polishing the lamp chimneys in the morning. She was with us for five years and made \$5 a month. On Christmas my mother always gave her material for a new dress."

Asheim remembers the nuns from the local convent coming to her father for a donation. He said, "I won't do that, but I'll send two of my kids to your school," she recalls. She has fond memories of Sister Elmer Frances, her teacher at St. Mary's Academy, a French nun who

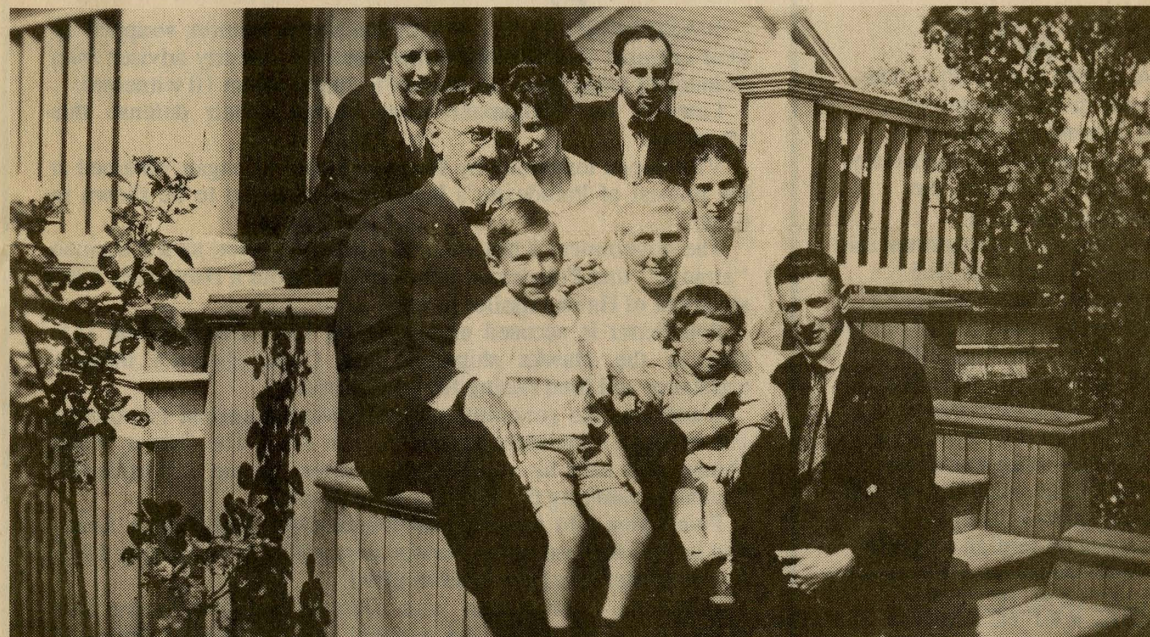


PHOTO COURTESY OF LOUISE WISE ASHEIM

Louise Wise Asheim's room in Portland is decorated with family memorabilia. Above, the family, including Louise, middle at right, poses in July 1917 at their home at 1064 Harrison St.

would let her sit on her lap.

Asheim doesn't remember feeling different about being Jewish. "We always celebrated Christmas and had a Christmas tree. There was one other Jewish girl in town. Her name was Ruby, and every time we had a party my mother insisted we invite her. All I knew were gentile girls — Marge Griffin, Madge Fulton, Gail Roberts, Gladys Graham, Nell Wilson, Maude Ross, Fanny Gregory and a girl named Constance."

Asheim remembers that when her father threatened to close Astoria's red light district, someone came to him with a \$10,000 bribe to leave it open. "He said 'No, I won't, not for any amount of money,' and closed it down."

When asked if she'd like to visit Astoria again, she says "No. I'd rather go to New York."

**SHE AND HER** husband lived in New York City for many years. They moved there from Portland, where they moved after living in Spokane for 13 years. The couple had four children, two

of whom died in infancy.

Things didn't go too well for the Asheims in the Depression, during which they lived in Portland. "We lost our home, so without telling anybody I went to the superintendent at Meier & Frank's department store and asked for a job. I had no experience and had never had a job, and the policy of the store was not to hire married women. I told him 'I know you do hire married women, I know a widow that works for you.' Then I asked him if he knew Herman Wise. He said, 'Of course.' Then I told him I was his daughter. The superintendent said, 'Well, that's different. You're hired.'"

So Asheim worked in the china and glassware department at the store for several years.

**PORTLAND BECAME HER** home again when she was 80. She had lived in New York City for 20 years, but after suffering a stroke, she moved at the insistence of her son-in-law, a doctor, who said she shouldn't be alone in her apartment.

Asheim is the last surviving member of her family. Her sisters and brothers died young. She has four grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

People wishing to contact her can write to Asheim at the Robison Jewish Home, 6125 S.W. Boundary St., Portland, Ore. 97221.

## Centenarian's father 'unusual and influential'

By VERA GAULT  
For The Daily Astorian

Herman Wise (1862-1926) was not only the head of a remarkable family but was a remarkable citizen of Astoria. From the time he arrived in Astoria as a German immigrant at age 18 until his

death at age 64, he contributed richly to the life of the community.

In 1883 Wise opened a clothing store on Commercial Street about where Newberry's is now. For the next 45 years he combined business and civic services with boundless energy and enthusiasm. In 1896 he and his wife, Sarah, bought the 1880 Victorian house at 1064 Harrison which was headquarters for their lively family of two sons and three daughters for the next 30 years.

Wise loved people and people loved him. He was a member of most every group in town, Knights of Pythias, Masonic Order, Elks, Eagles and helped organized the Fishermen's Cooperative. He loved patriotic events and was several times president of the Fourth of July Committee and the Regatta Association.

Wise was an active Democrat. In 1893, he served as city treasurer. He was appointed postmaster on two occasions, serving for a total of 13 years. In 1906 he was elected mayor. Ready to step down at the end of his term, he was nominated by both Democrats and Republicans to run again. During that term, the 1908 Regatta committee announced that due to shortage of workers and funds they were canceling the event. Mayor Wise declared that the Regatta must go on. He rallied the committees, organized boat races and appointed his daughter, Harriet, to be queen. Later the event was pronounced "one of the best Regattas the town ever had."

Wise amazed people with his generosity. Early in his business years, he started giving an annual party for his customers. That soon included

everyone in town. Sometimes the events were huge picnics or dinner dances. One time he put on a masked ball and 400 couples showed up. Always generous prizes were distributed. When Astoria's first public library opened, Wise donated sets of books. When the new city hall (now the Heritage Center) was dedicated, the mayor ordered 2,000 souvenir postcards which he distributed so all could share his pride in the new civic center.

In 1926 Wise was pressured to run for county judge. He campaigned with his characteristic vigor and won a decisive victory. But he never got to serve, for five days after the election, he died in his sleep. Among the flood of memorials and eulogies, he was extolled as "one of the most unusual and influential men who ever lived in Astoria."